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SB 2223 SD 1 RELATING TO SALES OF SEAFOOD

Statement for House Committee on
Ocean and Marine Resources
March 16, 1990

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The purpose of this bill is to prohibit the sale of ahi, opakapaka, or onaga that are less than three pounds in weight.

Our statement on this bill does not represent an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

The underlying intent of this bill is to ensure the future presence in Hawaiian waters of these economically important fish species which are subject to increasing fishing pressure. As noted in the Combined Fishery Management Plan for the Bottomfish and Seamount Groundfish Fisheries, prepared by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Councils, overharvesting of bottomfish such as opakapaka is likely responsible for the diminished supply of the fresh product to the domestic market. According to the Fisheries Management Plan, the recovery time required to rebuild bottomfish populations to harvestable levels depends on the reproductive biology and recruitment of the affected species. In the case of ahi, it is our understanding that they do not begin to reproduce until they reach approximately 30 pounds, hence it would appear that no protection of the parent stock would be offered by the 3 pound limit. On the other hand, Opakapaka are known to reach sexual maturity at three pounds thus a size limitation of three pounds will act as a deterrent to the harvest of recruitments and also serve to augment spawning populations. To avoid short term loss to the fishermen the minimum size limits could be increased incrementally. Thus the limit might be set at 1.5 pounds for the first year, 2.0 pounds for the second, etc. Limitations on species caught or catch weights should be guided whenever possible by the biological basis for those decisions.

One final point to bring to your attention. Since deepwater bottomfish usually suffer damage from gas expansion as they are hauled to the surface a minimum size limit for bottomfish must aim to discourage the capture of undersized fish rather than just to require the release of undersized fish which will not survive anyway. To avoid capture of undersized fish, requirements for the use of larger sized fish hooks might be considered in rulemaking.